

Making the Whole Student Visible: The Descriptive Review of a Child

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Physical Presence and Gesture. Characteristic gestures and expressions: How are these visible in the child's face, hands, body attitudes? How do they vary, and in response to what circumstances (e.g., indoors and outdoors)? Characteristic level of energy: How would you describe the child's rhythm and pace? How does it vary? How would you describe the child's voice: its rhythm, expressiveness, inflection?

Disposition. How would you describe the child's characteristic temperament and its range (e.g., intense, even, up-and-down)? How are feelings expressed? Fully? Rarely? How do you "read" the child's feelings? Where and how are they visible? What is the child's emotional tone or "color" (e.g., vivid, bright, serene, etc.)?

Relationships with Children and Adults. Does the child have friends? How would you characterize those attachments? Are they consistent? Changeable? Is the child recognized within the group? How is this recognition expressed? Is the child comfortable in the group? How would you describe the child's casual, day-to-day contact with others? How does this daily contact vary? When there are tensions, how do they get resolved? How would you describe the child's relationship to you? To other adults?

Activities and Interests. What are the child's preferred activities? Do these reflect underlying interests that are visible to you? For example, does drawing or story writing center on recurrent and related motifs such as superhuman figures, danger and rescue, volcanoes, and other large-scale events? How would you describe the range of the child's interests? Which interests are intense, passionate? How would you characterize the child's engagement with projects (e.g., quick, methodical, slapdash, thorough)? Is the product important to the child? What is the response to mishaps, frustrations? Are there media that have a strong appeal for the child (e.g., paint, blocks, books, woodworking)?

Formal Learning. What is the child's characteristic approach to a new subject or process or direction? In learning, what does the child rely on (e.g., observation, memory, trial and error, steps and sequence, getting the whole picture, context)? How does that learning approach vary from subject to subject? What is the child's characteristic attitude toward learning? How would you characterize the child as a thinker? What ideas and content have appeal? Is there a speculative streak? A problem-solving one? A gift for analogy and metaphor? For image? For reason and logic? For insight? For intuition? For the imaginative leap? For fantasy? What are the child's preferred subjects? What conventions and skills come easily? Which are hard?